

China raises alarm over Yangtze environmental damage

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Two workers clean up trash along the bank of the Yangtze River near the Three Gorges Dam in Yichang, in central China's Hubei province on August 1. China will spend billions of dollars treating sewage and planting forests to arrest massive environmental degradation along the Yangtze river and its Three Gorges reservoir, officials said Tuesday.

China will spend billions of dollars treating sewage and planting forests to arrest massive environmental degradation along the Yangtze river and its Three Gorges reservoir, officials said Tuesday.

"Generally speaking, the ecological state (of the river) is still far from what the Communist Party and people are demanding," forestry minister Jia Zhibang told journalists.

"For numerous reasons, the forests on both sides of the river have been seriously degraded, leading to bare mountains and hills that have led to repeated [natural disasters](#)" such as landslides.

The new plans call for an increase in forest coverage along the 600-kilometre-long (370-mile-long) reservoir to 65 percent from the current 22 percent, Chongqing city mayor Huang Qifan said at the same news briefing.

More than 10 billion yuan (1.5 billion dollars) will be invested in the forestry campaign.

Meanwhile, Chongqing, a mega-city of more than 30 million people upriver from the reservoir, will invest heavily in treatment of urban wastewater, officials said.

Critics of the 22.5-billion-dollar Three Gorges Dam hydro-electric project -- the world's largest -- which created the vast reservoir have long complained about its huge human and environmental toll.

Critics have said it is causing erosion along the banks and preventing the river from flushing out pollution.

Officials had said previously that 1.4 million people were forced to relocate to make way for the reservoir, but earlier this year China said an additional 300,000 people would be relocated.

The new relocations were aimed at curbing pollution and protecting residents from frequent landslides blamed on the rising reservoir.

Recent torrential rains have once again spotlighted the [environmental problems](#), with massive quantities of trash and other debris washed into the river, threatening to jam up the dam, state media have reported.

The garbage was so thick in places that people could walk across it, the China Daily newspaper said.

To help curb worsening water pollution, Chongqing, which has invested 50 billion yuan on sewage treatment facilities in recent years, will invest another 28 billion yuan in the coming three years, Huang said.

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